

A Letter from a Gentleman in the Country to his Representative in Parliament, shewing the expedience of taking away 25 Ca. 2. ca. 2. as to making the receiving the Sacrament a Qualification for an Office.

SIR,

Nothing certainly can be more offensive to God Almighty than to abuse his own Institutions, which none do more than they, who make use of them for other purposes, than they were in their original institution design'd.

I desire you therefore seriously to consider with me, these following things, and by that time you have well weigh'd them, I hope you will think your Letter answer'd.

The first thing I observe to you is, The nature and end of the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, as it is now, and ever hath been owned by the Church of England since the Reformation. And as to this, I shall not give it you in my own words, but the words of the Articles, the Homilies, and some Divines of the Church of England.

Of the Articles. *Sacraments ordained of Christ, be not only badges or tokens of Christians mens profession; but rather they be certain sure Witnessers, and effectual signs of grace, and Gods good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.* Declares the Sacraments to be but two; then adds, *That the Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a whole-some effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves Damnation, as S. Paul saith.*

39 Articles of Religion, as approved and allowed by the assent and consent of Queen Elizabeth, and confirmed by the Convocation 1571. Art. 25.

Of the Homilies. *Now with like, or rather more brevity, you shall hear how many Sacraments there be, that were instituted by our Saviour Christ, and are to be continued, and received of every Christian in due time and order, and for such purpose as our Saviour Christ willed them to be received. And as for the number of them, if they should be considered according to the exact signification of a Sacrament; namely, for the visible signs, expressly commanded in the New Testament; whereunto is annexed the promise of free forgiveness of our sin, and of our holiness and joining in Christ, there be but two, namely, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. For this is quoted St. Augustine.*

Book of Homilies, f. 213.

Of Divines. *So much I told you at the beginning; that Sacraments were outward rights and solemnities, to express our consent to the new Covenant: and whereby we signifie our settled purpose, and engage our faith, to perform the duties of Christianity; as ever we expect that Christ Jesus should be a Saviour to us. And particularly applies it to the Lords Supper.*

Patrick's Christian Sacrifice, p. 32.

*This Mystery was instituted as a federal or Covenant Right to be used under the Gospel, to engage all such as use it to the strict observation of that Religion, which is establish'd by the Gospel.*

Pellings Discourse of the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, p. 78.

I might add Dr. Taylor, Hammond, and indeed all the Devout men of the Church of England, that have writ upon this Sacred Rite, who all agree in the same thing: But for brevities sake I omit them.

And shall next consider what the persons are, which the Church of England reckons duly qualified for the Lords Supper.

*Examine your lives and conversations by the rule of Gods Commandments, and where insoever ye shall perceive your selves to have offended, either by will, word or deed, there to bewail your own sinfulness, and to confess your selves to Almighty God, with full promise of amendment of life.*

Book of Common Prayer, Exhortation before the Sacrament.

*Consider how St. Paul exhorteth all persons diligently to try and examine themselves, before they presume to eat of that Bread and drink of that Cup. For as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart, and lively faith, we receive that holy Sacrament (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ and Christ in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us) so is the danger great if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lords body; we kindle Gods wrath against us; we provoke him to plague us with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death.*

Book of Common Prayer, Exhortation at the time of Administring the Lords Supper.

*Let such as intend to be Communicants, take care first to be sincere and uniform penitents, and resolve stedfastly to keep these Vows, which they are understood to make so solemnly before Gods Table. It is a fearful thing to lay ones hand upon the holy Evangelists, and then to be perjur'd. But the wickedness is far greater, to lay ones hand, as it were, upon Christs Body; and then to be a Traytor; and to take Judas his Morsel into ones mouth with the Devil in his heart, is the ready way to be as he was, a Son of Perdition.*

Pellings Discourse, p. 101, 102.

And now let the Act of Parliament of 25 Ca. 2. ca. 2. be considered with what is before laid down, and by that time, I hope you will see sufficient reason to take that Act away, unless you will fix the greatest blemish upon one of the best Churches in the World.

25 Ca. 2. ca. 2. Bibli. Stat. fol. 1458.

By this Act of Parliament, all persons that have any employment (except as in the Act is excepted) Civil or Military, are bound to take the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, to receive the Sacrament according to the usage of the Church of England, and subscribe the Declaration against Transubstantiation; and if they do it not within the time, and at the places therein and thereby prescribed for that purpose, the employment or office is thereby adjudged void.

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I confess this Act is Intituled, *An Act for preventing dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants*; And begins thus, For Preventing Dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants, and quieting the minds of his Majesties good Subjects, be it Enacted, &c.

But if you, Sir, please to recollect your self, and call to mind that this Act of Parliament was made, in that very Year, that Alderman *Love* complained in the House of Commons, of the Invasion that *Charles II.* had made upon the Law in issuing of a Declaration for Liberty of Conscience, against express Acts of Parliament (for which that Gentleman hath been deservedly had in very great esteem by English men of all Perswasions) you may give a shrewd guess out of whose Quiver this Arrow flew; for altho the word *Popish* Recusant be made use of, yet it is to me very plain, that the *Protestant* Recusant was intended, and that out of revenge, because he was then so just to the Liberty and Property of the Subject in general, that he would rather abridge himself of his Liberty of serving God according to his own private Conscience, than contribute any thing to the placing a Dispensing power in the Crown, of which our Laws are profoundly ignorant.

Then was this Law set on Foot and carryed, by which all the Dissenting Protestants are kept out of all places of publick Employment, how justly will by and by appear.—

But before I come to that, pray Sir, consider that the Sacrament of the Lords Supper is a most Sacred Ordinance, instituted by Christ for Religious, and not to serve Secular, purposes; and therefore to make it a Test to qualify a Man for Civil Employment, is really to profane the Ordinance, and an express Breach of a positive Law; *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.*

A Man may perhaps be very fit to serve the Government as a Collonel, Captain, Lieutenant, &c. that is by no means fit to receive the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, must the Government now want his service, or must he damn his own Soul to serve the Government? This is a hard Case, yet so it is as the Law now stands.

Again, a Man perhaps that is a Dissenter is a much better Soldier, &c. and more capable of serving the Government than another Man, but he can't receive the Sacrament according to the usage of the Church of England; the Government now must take up with one less able to serve it, or he must play the right down Hypocrite to capacitate himself to do good as a Man; in plain English, he must become a Disciple of the Devils, to evidence to Men that he is a Protestant, and where is the sense of this?

Moreover, if this Law were designed really against the Papists, it hath not its end upon them; for as I am credibly informed, and doubt not to make appear, the Pope hath given the English Papists a dispensation to do all that this Law requires, so that the conscientious Dissenting Protestants (who really fear God, and honour the King and Queen) are the only persons barr'd by this Act from a share in the Government. And I am sure of this, that he that is at this day for weakning the Protestant Interest, is more then half a Papist by his Acting, whatever his external profession may be; and I know nothing can weaken it more than keeping up this *Sacramentary* Test.

It is the desire of all good Men, that all Protestants were of a mind in every thing, but seeing, tho that be not, yet, we all are agreed in the fundamentals of Religion; methinks the Church of England, like a tender Mother, should pity the Dissenters, and seeing they are not strong enough to come up to Her, she should for the preservation of the Substance of Religion amongst us, yield to their weakness, and remove all things out of their way that hinders them from uniting with Her against the common Enemy, the Papists I mean.

The taking away this Act of Parliament, would, I doubt not, so cement us, that all the Policy of Rome added to the prowess of France, would never be able to shake us, much less to overthrow us.

And now Sir, I should think this were reason enough for the Parliament to take away this Law, and put the matter out of dispute; but if they think it not fit, truly to be free with you, I am of Opinion, that His Majesty and the Government may have the use of the Dissenting Protestants without it, by vertue of a Proviso in the Act it self, which Proviso is this; *Provided also, that any person who by his or her neglect or refusal, according to this Act, shall lose or forfeit any Office, may be capable by a new grant of the said Office, or of any other, and to have and to hold the same again, such person taking the said Oaths, and doing all other things required by this Act, so as such Office be not granted to, and actually enjoyed by some other person at the time of the regranting thereof.*

Now I observe, 1. That the Exercise of any Office within this Law is good, until the time perfixed for the taking the Oaths and Sacrament be elapsed.

2. That notwithstanding an actual loss or forfeiture, the person losing or forfeiting his employment, is capable of a re-grant. And,

3. That it is but renewing the Commissions the oftner, or in Case of forfeiture making a re-grant, for the Act doth no where require your taking the Oaths and receiving the Sacrament before your grant or Commission, but only saith it shall be void in case you do not do it in the time prescribed, and makes the same person capable of a re-grant, even before he hath taken the Oaths or received the Sacrament.

Thus, Sir, I have freely given you my mind, I shall conclude all with my hearty Prayer, that God Almighty would give England at this day to know the things that belong to her peace, before they be hid from her Eyes.

I am Sir

Your most humble Servant.